3. GET SUCKLING PIGS OFF TO FAST START
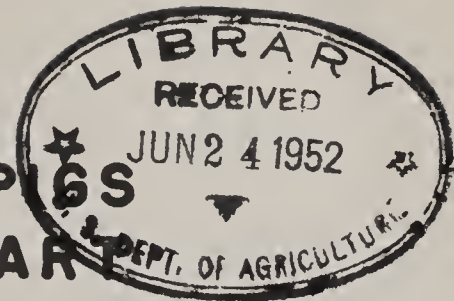
U.S. Bureau of Animal Industry, Agricultural Research Administration
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

After young pigs are away to a good start and the sow is back on full feed (a week to 10 days after birth) they should be moved from the farrowing pen to a clean pasture lot. Good pastures can save as much as 15 percent on the feed bill and also help control parasites in the young pigs.

At this stage the sow may be self-fed. The ration should contain plenty of protein and mineral nutrients to assure a good milk flow. She needs about twice as much feed when suckling pigs as during pregnancy. See that the sow gets enough feed to maintain weight, if possible. A good mixed ration to be self-fed on pasture consists of the following: 900 pounds ground yellow corn, 300 pounds ground oats, 350 pounds standard middlings, 75 pounds tankage or meat scraps, 75 pounds fishmeal, 150 pounds soybean meal, 100 pounds alfalfa meal, and 50 pounds of mineral mixture.

The suckling pig will begin eating the sow's feed when he is about 3 weeks of age. By this time an antibiotic has been added to the ration. Five or 6 pounds of a commercial product, such as aureomycin or terramycin, to 1 ton feed mixture is adequate.

PROVIDE EXTRA FEED IN CREEP

A creep should be made for the small pigs where they can eat by themselves undisturbed by the mother. Such feeds as shelled corn, rolled oats, a good quality of protein supplement, skimmilk, if available, will give the young pigs a good start. The sow's peak of milk production is reached when the pigs are about 3 weeks old, then starts declining. The little pigs start eating supplemental feeds at this time. By weaning age the pig has learned to eat well, which eases the shock of separation from its mother.

The profitable pig continues to grow and make good gains from the time it is farrowed until it is ready for market. The heavier the weight of the pig at birth and at weaning time, the earlier it will reach market weight. Results of studies on birth weight of pigs show that the heavier the weight the higher the percentage of weaned pigs. For example, only 30.2 percent of pigs weighing 1.5 pounds at birth survived at weaning; 74.2 percent of pigs averaging 3.0 pounds at birth were weaned, while 83.5 percent of pigs weighing 4.0 pounds at birth were weaned. The 1.5 pound pig at birth gained at the rate of 1.18 pounds daily to 190 days of age; the 3.0 pound pig gained 1.35 pounds daily; while the 4.0 pound pig gained 1.44 pounds daily to the same age.

SET SCHEDULE FOR LATE SUCKLING PERIOD

In order to give pigs a fast start in life, the swine producer should follow a set time schedule during the suckling period to perform certain treatments or operations. If properly timed and performed, these operations will cause less interference with the growth of the pig while nursing than at any other period.

✔ At 2 weeks of age: Castrate male pigs produced for market. The operation at this age is done with little shock and loss of blood. Also there is less chance for infection and complications.

✔ At 3 to 4 weeks of age: Start creep-feeding pigs on pasture as a supplement to the mother's milk. This prevents the sow from losing too much weight while suckling, and young pigs have learned to eat well and make cheaper gains than older pigs.

✔ At 6 to 8 weeks of age: Vaccinate pigs against hog cholera while suckling their dams. Vaccination is a cheap insurance against the costly losses that may occur in unvaccinated pigs.

✔ At 8 weeks of age: Wean pigs by taking mothers away and allowing pigs to remain in their accustomed home. Sows can be rebred for another litter.

✔ At 10 weeks of age: If necessary, treat for internal or external parasites, following the advice of prescribed methods of treatment.

✔ Reduce pig losses by conducting an adequate sanitation program.

Only healthy pigs return greatest profit on labor and feed invested. Unthrifty pigs waste feed, lower profits and spread disease through the herd.